

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

Please amend Claims 1, 9, 14 and 21 as follows.

1. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:

sheet stacking means for stacking sheets;

sheet processing means for processing the sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means;

a sheet holding portion which stores supplied sheets while preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means are processed by the sheet processing means; and

sheet conveying means for conveying the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the sheet stacking means,

wherein the supplied sheets are held in the sheet holding portion with upstream edges in a conveying direction thereof aligned until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion, and

wherein the stored sheets are discharged to the sheet stacking means from the sheet holding portion by the sheet conveying means when a downstream edge in the conveying direction of a sheet to be supplied last has preceded the downstream edges in the conveying direction of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising control means for controlling the number of sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the sheet processing means.

4. (Previously Presented) An sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising control means for performing:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means to processing with the sheet processing means and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the sheet stacking means.

5. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 4,

wherein the specific sheet is at least one selected from the group consisting of a sheet with a length equal to or larger than a predetermined length, a sheet for an overhead projector, a color printed sheet, a sheet designated as a top cover, a sheet designated as thick paper, a sheet designated as thin paper, and a sheet with a tab.

6. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,

wherein the sheet processing means is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack.

7. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,  
wherein the sheet conveying means comprises a first rotary member and a second rotary  
member which rotate in contact with the sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means from both  
sides of the sheets.

8. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,  
wherein the sheet holding portion holds the supplied sheets linearly.

9. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1,  
wherein the sheet holding portion stacking means comprises:  
moving means for moving the supplied sheets in to an upstream direction side; and  
an abutment stopper against which the upstream edges of the sheets moved by the  
moving means are brought into abutment.

10. (Original) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 3 or 4,  
wherein the sheet processing means is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack, and the control  
means increases the number of sheets, which are stored in the sheet holding means, in proportion  
to positions to be stitched by the stapler.

11. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet; and  
a sheet processing apparatus which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means,  
wherein the sheet processing apparatus is a sheet processing apparatus according to any one of claims 1, and 3 to 9.

12. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;  
the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1 which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and  
control means for controlling the number of the sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the sheet processing means.

13. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;  
the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 1 which applies processing to the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and  
control means for performing:  
a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting preceding sheets stacked on the sheet stacking means to processing with the sheet processing means and simultaneously causing subsequent sheets to be held in the sheet holding

portion and, after the processing of the preceding sheets ends, conveying the subsequent sheet and the preceding sheets together using the sheet conveying means to discharge the preceding sheet from the sheet stacking means, and then stacking the subsequent sheet on the sheet stacking means; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be held in the sheet holding portion but causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the sheet stacking means, processing the sheet with the sheet processing means, and then discharging the sheet from the sheet stacking means with the sheet conveying means.

14. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus, comprising:

a processing tray on which sheets are stacked;  
a processing unit which applies processing to the sheets stacked on the processing tray;  
a sheet holding portion which stores supplied sheets while preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray are processed by the processing unit; and  
sheet discharging rotary member which discharges the sheets stored in the sheet holding portion to the processing tray,

wherein the supplied sheets are held in the sheet holding portion with upstream edges in a discharging direction thereof aligned until the last sheet of the sheets to be stored is supplied in the sheet holding portion, and

wherein the stored sheets are discharged to the processing tray from the sheet holding portion by the sheet discharging rotary member when a downstream edge in the discharging

direction of a sheet to be supplied last has preceded the downstream edges in the discharging direction of the sheets held in the sheet holding portion by a predetermined amount.

15. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising a control portion which controls the number of sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the processing unit.

16. (Previously Presented) An sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, further comprising a control portion which performs:

a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray to processing with the processing unit and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion; and

a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action including not causing the specific sheet to be stored in the sheet holding portion but, after the discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding portion to be stacked on the processing tray.

17. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 16, wherein the specific sheet is at least one selected from the group consisting of a sheet with a length equal to or larger than a predetermined length, a sheet for an overhead projector, a color printed sheet, a sheet designated as a top cover, a sheet designated as thick paper, a sheet designated as thin paper, and a sheet with a tab.

18. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the processing unit is a stapler which stitches a sheet stack.

19. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet discharging rotary member comprises a first rotary member and a second rotary member which rotate in contact with the sheets stacked on the processing tray from both sides of the sheets.

20. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet holding portion holds the supplied sheets linearly.

21. (Currently Amended) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14, wherein the sheet holding portion processing tray comprises:

a return roller which moves the supplied sheets in to an upstream direction side; and

an abutment stopper against which the upstream edges of the sheets moved by the return roller are brought into abutment.

22. (Previously Presented) A sheet processing apparatus according to claim 15 or 16, wherein the processing unit is a stapler for stitching a sheet stack, and the control portion increases the number of sheets, which are stored in the sheet holding portion, in proportion to positions to be stitched by the stapler.

23. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet; and  
a sheet processing apparatus which processes the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means,  
wherein the sheet processing apparatus is a sheet processing apparatus according to any one of claims 14 to 22.

24. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;  
the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14 which processes the sheet on which the image is formed by the image forming means; and  
a control portion which controls the number of the sheets to be stored in the sheet holding portion according to a processing time of the processing unit.

25. (Previously Presented) An image forming apparatus, comprising:  
image forming means for forming an image on a sheet;  
the sheet processing apparatus according to claim 14 which processes the sheet on which  
the image is formed by the image forming means; and  
a control portion which performs:  
a first action in a case in which the sheet is an ordinary sheet, the first action including  
subjecting the preceding sheets stacked on the processing tray to stitch processing with the  
processing unit and simultaneously causing the subsequent sheets to be held in the sheet holding  
portion; and  
a second action in a case in which the sheet is a specific sheet, the second action  
including not causing the specific sheet to be held in the sheet holding portion but, after the  
discharging of the preceding sheets, causing the specific sheet to pass through the sheet holding  
portion to be stacked on the processing tray.